

Migrations in Wyoming's Wind River Country

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Recording info:

Voice: Professional male voice

Background:

When you travel down Wyoming Centennial Scenic Byway Highway 191, you are crossing the pathway of one of the world's most important animal migrations. (sound of hoof beats on ground, elk bugling, animal snorts, swans honking)

In this area, the pronghorn antelope, a species unique to North America, have the longest overland migration in the lower 48 states. These magnificent creatures, among the fastest runners on the continent, are important residents of Wyoming. They number in the tens of thousands in northwest Wyoming, at least for now. (fast paced music)

Wyoming's antelope travel hundreds of miles from Grand Teton National Park in northern Wyoming south to the Red Desert on the border of Colorado. Antelope need to migrate for their survival in the winter. Scientists who documented the importance of this migration route have also learned that the antelope must navigate around many human caused barriers to travel this migration route, used for hundreds of years.

(sound of oil rig, and large trucks, construction building)

In many places the western Wyoming migration route for the antelope is imperiled by intense oil and gas development. Heavy equipment is being moved from place to place, and structures are being built on, or near, the antelope's historic migration route.

(western music interspersed with sounds of people, pets, and neighborhoods)

Housing developments also intrude into the antelope's migration. Fences, dogs, and general human disruptions cause antelope to shy away from their pathway. It is only through conscientious residents that these permanent impacts can be mitigated.

(Highway noise)

One of the greatest threats to the antelope is crossing busy highways, where they are often hit and killed by vehicles. The pronghorn prefer to avoid human activity so development causes the animals to avoid the location. When that area is part of the migrating animal route, it creates stress for the animals, who instinctively follow this ancient corridor as a survival strategy.

(music with sounds of cold wind, crunching snow)

That stress can spell early death for these animals as they struggle to survive northwest Wyoming's seven months of winter with temperatures reaching 40 below zero. With such severe conditions, the antelope need all conditions in their favor for them to make it through Wyoming's

long winters. Scientists have documented that once a migration route is disrupted, animal numbers plummet.

Many groups are at work to preserve this migration route that an estimated 100,000 antelope, moose, deer and elk travel to the Upper Green River Valley, the beautiful valley that lies between the Wind River and Wyoming mountain ranges.

Recently the U.S. Forest Service and other agencies designated the antelope migration route in northwest Wyoming to be protected under their current management plans. And there are many private efforts to protect this special migration route for the protection of the antelope.

For Wyoming's antelope to be given the greatest chance to flourish and remain in abundant numbers, travelers are a key part of the solution.

Antelope run up to 60 miles per hour and surprise many highway drivers. Keep your eye peeled for their quick movements on the roadside. In northwest Wyoming, the migration path that crosses Wyoming's Centennial Scenic Byway 191 is busy with antelope in the spring-usually from April through June. So, make sure to slow down when you are driving, go even slower than the posted speed limit. Hundreds of antelope are killed each year from accidents with vehicles. It won't matter how successful efforts are to protect our antelope if they are hit and killed on our highways.

(swell of western music)

Help protect these important natives for many decades to come. Slow down when driving through Wyoming to catch a glimpse of Wyoming's pronghorn antelope as they navigate their way across the land.

This audio essay is brought to you by the Scenic Byways of Wyoming programs in coordination with the Wyoming Centennial Byway Steering committee, the US Forest Service and Derryberry Audio Incorporated.